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Changing Lives in the Khasi Hills

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Children taught Ghandian ideas

By John Hewerdine

Of the places I have visited, many readers of *The Inquirer* will know that India is the one I know best, though I hesitate to generalise about a country with such a rich diversity of faiths and cultures. What I do know about India is that the economic success of recent years is focussed on a few well-known places and little of it filters down to the majority of the population in the many, many villages which were the focus of the great Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. Economic success in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata has caused inflation in India and it is out in the rural villages where this has put pressure on the wellbeing of so many poor families, unable to keep pace with the increasing price of rice and atta.

Most of the Unitarian families in India are in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, up in that North Eastern region, known historically as Assam. They are tribal people and very proud of this. 'Khasi by Blood, Indian by Accident' is the lament of many. The spirit of the Freedom Fighter exists in the majority of the villages and, as a peace-loving people, they are largely neglected by the Indian Government.

Indian economics are beyond the likes of me. This is partly due to the fact that corruption exists wherever you look and nobody has the will (or seemingly the ability) to change it any day soon. Most States are unable to find the money to pay their teachers. Some have put them on half-pay. Government employees, though entitled to a retirement pension, often do not receive it. Foreign aid and NGO projects are still needed to keep the less privileged off the streets. That is why we should continue our work in the Khasi Hills.



A child studying at the Kong Barr Children's village in the Khasi Hills. Photo by John Hewerdine

Over my lifetime, the biggest social difference we British Unitarians have helped to enable is in the field of education. Margaret Barr, who went to live there in the early 1930s was a gifted teacher. She not only opened many schools in the hills but trained her teachers along Gandhian lines, encouraging graduates to return to their villages after higher education (usually in Shillong or Jowai). Higher salaries and Government jobs tempt graduates to work in the cities and Margaret

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Changing the lives of Khasi children



Young people at the children's village, built as a memorial to Unitarian teacher Margaret Barr. Photo by John Harley

By John Harley

After 11 years in the role of GA Youth Coordinator I realised I needed to step away from the Youth Programme for a little time and find some new perspectives. I wanted to see Unitarianism in action in a different context and it wasn't long until I knew that I had to travel to India. In 1986 I went backpacking around India with my cousin – we were lucky to travel to Kashmir as well as Agra and Shimla. I will never forget the journeys we had on trains, buses and 'luxury video coaches' (the inverted commas cannot be emphasised enough!). As a 22

year old student the colours, sheer diversity of livelihoods in the markets, the smells of spice and hospitality of the people, the beauty and the poverty made a huge impact on me.

In November 2016 I travelled to Meghalaya and Chennai to visit Unitarian congregations. I was invited to lead some workshops for young adults on leading RE groups and I preached some sermons with the aid of skilful interpreters. Looking back, one of the highlights of the whole trip was staying for three nights in the Annie Margaret Barr's Children's Home, mentioned above by John Hewerdine. It was inspiring to witness a living and growing Unitarian project run according to Unitarian values. Around twenty boys and girls live in the house aged between 8 and 17, cared for by two 'mothers' and supported by tutors and a counsellor. It felt like living in a huge family and their generosity of spirit was overwhelming; all the children shared household chores and appeared to find time each day to visit the orphanage's pig and scratch her behind her ears with a stick.

They greeted each day with a yoga session at 5am and all attended the Annie Margaret Barr Primary and Secondary school. I thought their English was stronger than many of their classmates at the school; this is possibly because they have a steady stream of foreign Unitarians to stay – indeed during my time there, the community were sharing fond memories of recent visits from Barbara Smith and Elizabeth Faiers. I was shown the smart new social hall funded by the British Unitari-

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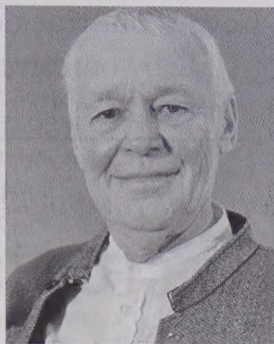
Unitarians help build orphanage

(Continued from previous page)

was keen to get trained students back into the villages after their education. This was very much part of the Gandhian philosophy of improving the 'Quality of life for the Village People'.

Now, many of Margaret's ex-pupils are teachers and head-teachers and the Shillong Unitarians have an exemplary record in their schools. This has helped them to move forward into the 21st century by leaps and bounds. Some help from both British and American Unitarians has enabled the schools to develop and gain financial support from the Indian Government. Once established, the school has to achieve certain targets before being accepted by the government for funding. Our General Assembly and more recently the Bowland Trust have helped them to achieve higher standards.

When I was in Kharang with our son Josh, 14 years ago, we were shown a piece of land which belonged to the Kharang Rural Centre. This plot of land, where Margaret Barr's house once stood, was being considered as a site for a new memorial to Kong Barr. This exciting new project involved the building of an Orphanage/Children's Village. Over the intervening years, the site was made over to a local Management Committee of the Unitarian Union of North East India. With support from the Unitarian Universalists in America and the closely



John Hewerdine

allied Partnership Church Council, along with our own General Assembly, plans were approved, money raised, and building took place.

There is much good news emerging from the Khasi Hills at present. Another project which the Bowland Trust has recently initiated is a complete refurbishment of the hospital which was built as a memorial to Kong Barr. In the last couple of decades, the memorial hospital became neglected and run-down. Now, not only has the building had a complete refurbishment but staffing is being provided to breathe new life into the place.

At the time of writing this article we heard from

Kong Elgiva Shullai, a member of the Management Group. She reported that there had been a dedication of the refurbished Health Centre by the Rev Derrick Pariat, President of the Unitarian Union of North East India. The welcome address was given by Dr Rica Lamar and short speeches followed by two local village Headmen and a senior member of the Health Centre. Prayers were offered by Rev Darihun Khriam. A commemorative plaque was then unveiled and a ribbon cut by senior member Tenor Myllemngapp, Assistant Secretary during the time of Margaret Barr. This was followed by inspection of the hospital and refreshments.

John Hewerdine is a member of congregations at Padiham and Chorley.

Social projects keep our faith alive

(Continued from previous page)

an Women's League. During my stay many of the children were revising energetically for national exams and I was impressed by their positivity and determination to learn even by candlelight in the evenings because of the nightly power cuts.

Kharang is a very rural and 'poor' region of the Khasi Hills and during my stay I had no access to the internet or phone signal. I found this surprisingly freeing and it meant that I had the rare experience of being fully present. It came to pass that exactly during my stay the American presidential election was taking place so I had no idea which candidate had won. I had a dream one night in which Donald Trump had been the victor and so I had the false hope of waking up and reassuring myself that I'd just had a bad dream! I was so shocked when I left the village and heard the result – it felt like a body blow. I realise now that in a very real sense the children who live in the AMB Children's Home are richer than the new billionaire president of the USA. The Unitarian witness that is transforming these children's lives is creating a value and life potential that cannot be measured by mere stocks and shares and the number of hotels one person may own.

During my stay I had long chats with Rev Nangroi Suting who is also a teacher at the Annie Margaret Barr Secondary School and his wife Bari (named after Margaret Barr) who is the secretary of the Children's Home. They told me the encouraging news that recently the Children's Home has been officially recognised by the Indian government and each child is partially funded to live there. However, government regu-



John Hewerdine

lations mean that the accommodation has to be improved and expanded in the next year in order to stay open and there is no government money for this work. There are plans to revitalise some ponds on the grounds of the orphanage and create a fish farm that will generate funds and the idea of a new Unitarian hostel in Shillong, the large city of the area, to house students and bring an income that will sponsor improved training for ministers.

We discussed the idea of creating links with the Youth Programme and developing an internship scheme for Unitarian young adults to have the opportunity of living in the Children's Home and exchanging skills and life experiences.

Above all I experienced a Unitarian social justice project that is very much alive, successful and making a huge difference to these children's lives and the future of such a vast nation. Staying there has galvanised my commitment to supporting our own homegrown social action initiatives. Two projects we can be proud of are the SimpleGifts Unitarian Centre for Social Action in Bethnal Green and Bridport Unitarians' recent volunteering at the Calais refugee camp. Such grass roots activity keeps our faith alive on so many levels. If we have a collective Unitarian vision it has to be earthed in our local communities and neighbourhoods. If you would like to help the Annie Margaret Barr Children's Home grow and flourish please send a cheque to Essex Hall (payable to 'The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches' – with India Fund JH – written on the back).

The Rev John Harley is General Assembly Youth Co-ordinator..

The INQUIRER

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Editor M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

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Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: admin@inquirer.org.uk

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Find out more about Unitarians

www.unitarian.org.uk

or email info@unitarian.org.uk

The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone – we find it with another.

– Thomas Merton

Not what you might think

The roots of Valentine's

By Cliff Reed

Although it bears the name of a Christian saint, Valentine's Day doesn't have much to do with Christianity. And Saint Valentine is a distinctly hazy figure, anyway, about whom hard evidence is very difficult to find. There may even have been two of them – both, reputedly, martyred for their faith. One was, possibly, a priest in 3rd-century Rome, the other a bishop, but as to whether or not these were one and the same person, no one really knows.

Either way, there is nothing reliable in the scanty tradition about either to associate them with love and romance: that all comes from the pagan side of things or, at least, from popular folklore. This holds that 14 February is the date when the birds pair off in preparation for mating and nest building – which is what those great tits are going on about!

In ancient Rome, though, the pagan festival of Lupercalia in mid-February was about human pairing-off, human lovemaking, and human fertility – all celebrated in customs that the Church disapproved of but never quite managed to eradicate from popular memory. Maybe it really is all about love being in the air!

The name 'February' has a rather surprising origin, bearing in mind its rather bleak, cold associations for us. February, for pagan Romans, was sacred to the goddess Juno Februata, which means, Juno of the Fever – the fever of love, that is, which reached fever-pitch at Lupercalia, when young men and women exchanged notes in order to make assignations for erotic games. This is what lies behind the modern custom of sending Valentine cards. In the 18th and 19th centuries, though, sending Valentines was less about romance, let alone sex, as about love of a more innocent nature, such as that between friends and family members.

Giving pagan Lupercalia the Christian gloss of Saint Valentine's Day, so depriving it of its original licentious overtones, was a familiar Church tactic with regard to such festivals. It has rather worn off in more recent times, though. It is significant, perhaps, that the word 'saint' has been generally dispensed with and 'Valentine' has become an entirely secular term. But we can't really complain that the 'real' meaning of Saint Valentine's Day has been lost because, as a Christian festival, it never truly had a 'real' meaning. So does it have any significance at all, other than being a money-spinner for greetings card manufacturers and a post-Christmas lifeline for the makers and sellers of chocolate? Well, the answer is probably, 'not much', although it does no harm to have a day that celebrates romantic love. It may not be the most important kind of love, but it probably means something to most of us – even if we are no longer gripped by the 'fever of love' – and so deserves recognition as an aspect of our lives that we would be poorer without. And it also reminds us that we are as much a part of nature's fertility cycle as the snowdrops and the great tits!

The Rev Cliff Reed is minister emeritus at Ipswich Unitarian Church.

With thanks

This colour issue of The Inquirer was sponsored by the Watford Unitarian Fellowship in memory of John Cornford 1922-2016, other long-term members, and the Fellowship's 70th anniversary. Learn more about the first Fellowship in the UK on page 11.

Create places of hope, not hate

By John Harley

Each morning since Donald Trump began his presidency I have woken up with a deep sense of dread and anxiety. It feels like we have been plunged into a really bad Hollywood disaster movie with a dreadful script to match. It reminds me of the excellent novel by Philip Roth *The Plot against America* – which imagines what would have happened if the aviation hero Charles Lindbergh, who had extreme isolationist views, had defeated Franklin Roosevelt in the 1940 presidential election. Roth describes the unfolding nightmare skilfully as America becomes a fascist ally of Hitler and Jews are oppressed and imprisoned right across America. We view this chaos and violence through the eyes of a particular family and slowly we see its members divided and broken by the political mayhem that explodes. Thankfully this story is just fiction.

What disturbs me is that Trump's hateful vision of ignorance, egomania and racism is already being made into reality. In my view his tirade of executive orders which include a ban on travellers from seven countries in the Middle East and Africa from entering the US sounds like the small-minded, reactionary views of a bigoted individual who, on finding himself president of the United States, now has the power to create government policy at the scrawl of a pen.

It was inspiring to witness the Women's March in Washington DC and marches all over the globe with some powerful, witty and clever banners. I know that many Unitarians took part on these mass demonstrations including a few of us in Bridport. Walking in a crowd mindfully feels like a healthy, proactive thing to do, but one major challenge many of us face is what to do with our anger and our disbelief on a daily basis – where do we take these emotions?

I would suggest our beloved Unitarian places of worship have an opportunity to become welcoming places for people of all faiths and none, to find a safe, supportive space for solace, peace of mind and reflection. This need many people have to be grounded and to try and make sense of these strong feelings of injustice is far wider than religion and politics – it is a deep human need to find a sense of belonging and to reach out to one another compassionately. Belief in God, for me, is primarily about exploring and knowing our *oneness*, that we are all one body and that we have a profound connection with one another. I am planning a day workshop at the Unitarian Chapel in the Garden in Bridport called 'Creating Hope', an event open to everyone who would like to express and earth their reactions to the Trump presidency through creative activities, meditation, silence and companionship.

Religious communities have a responsibility and I believe, a deep spiritual obligation, not to be silent about Trump, but to provide transformational spaces for people to believe in hope rather than indifference. I would argue that Unitarian congregations have a unique dissenting and liberal legacy to open up their doors for the local community to find circles of renewal and retreat in these troubled times. There is such a variety of events we can organise – from vigils to engagement groups to interfaith worship with other faith groups. We just have to use our imagination and remind ourselves that there are many people across the country who, vocal or silent, are disturbed by recent developments in the US and are looking for ways of joining other like-minded people to restore their



Unitarians in Bridport march to protest President Trump's policies. Photo by Heather Hamer

belief in humanity and feel they have a voice. To paraphrase the great parliamentarian Edmund Burke: The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men and women to do nothing.

Many Unitarian congregations are already taking a stand and creating responses to Trump's idiocy. Doug Muder writes in the Unitarian Universalist US magazine *UU World*:

'On the weekend after the election, I was leading the Sunday service at the Unitarian Church of Quincy, Illinois, the town where I grew up, but haven't lived for many years. Adams County had voted 3-to-1 for Trump, and the local Unitarians were feeling not just defeated, but encircled. To them, the voters who had rejected their values were not some abstract demographic like 'the white working class.' They were the neighbours.

Church was well attended that morning. I think the members just needed to be together, to look each other in the eye, and to know that they were not alone. We read, the responsive reading that lists the UU Principles. It felt good to say them out loud and hear others say them too. (*The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; A free and responsible search for truth and meaning; The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.*)

'No, we implicitly assured each other, we are not going to fall into despair. We are not going to retreat into our individual homes and hide or hibernate until some future time when (we hope) the dangers will have passed. If we were alone, fear and discouragement might overwhelm us, and those options might seem irresistible. But we are not alone.

'Have our countrymen forgotten why these values are important? Have issues we thought were closed forever come open again? Do we have to go back and make our case all over again from the beginning?

'Very well, then. Let's get started. Together. Why are we a congregation? This is why.'

The Rev John Harley is youth coordinator for the Unitarian General Assembly.

Too few candidates for Executive e

What happens next: Fewer than seven candidates came forward, so no election is necessary for the empty seats on the Executive Committee of the Unitarian General Assembly. Two incumbents and one new candidate will take their seats, leaving three more to fill.

Derek McAuley, chief officer of the General Assembly discussed the process he believes the EC will follow:

'There will be three vacancies which the EC are required by the Constitution to fill by co-option within six months. The EC will meet in February and I expect will decide to seek nominations and publicise a process. There will be requirement to seek support from others rather than simply self-nomination.

Matthew Smith – New member

Unitarian Association: More than 30 years – joined Cambridge Unitarian Church while at University.

Relevant experience within the Unitarian Community: Member of the President's Commission on Unitarian Education and Training (late 80s); GA Information Officer (1990-2004); Unitarian GA Representative at the World's Parliament of Religions, Cape Town, South Africa (1999); Successively a member of the Cambridge, Hampstead, Enfield & Barnet (now St Albans) and Newington Green congregations before ministry training. Member of the LDPA Council (2010-2012 approx.)

Current main occupation Minister, Framlingham & Bury St Edmunds (2014-)

Other relevant information: Hold a Postgraduate Certificate in Charity Management from South Bank University.

Extensive experience of governance issues as a Senior Committee Manager at the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Election statement: Surely, it is the sacred responsibility of every able Unitarian and Free Christian to consider a vision of our faith community that extends beyond his or her local congregation – and the implications that flow from that.

I am not suggesting that everyone must participate beyond their congregation – that would be impractical. However, we share a responsibility to cultivate Beloved Community in its fullness – without geographical restrictions and drawing strength from one another - if our vitally needed approach to religion is to flourish and survive in a world of increasing intolerance.

As a General Assembly, we need to deepen the links between the centre, congregations, Districts and affiliated societies. We need a focus on congregational growth - being clear why it matters. 'Salvation' has potentially multiple meanings but we should not walk away from language that is transformative.

The Next Steps initiative needs to be augmented to clarify how it will deliver support to existing congregations willing to grow.

Openness and transparency must also be a feature of the workings of the General Assembly. As a member of the General Assembly Executive I will work for meetings being open to reporting by *The Inquirer* newspaper.

Philip Colfox – Incumbent

Unitarian Association: Member of Bridport for 8 years, attended intermittently over the previous 25 years

Relevant experience within the Unitarian community: 2009 + Committee Bridport, Chair 2011; 2010 + Western Union; 2014 + Executive Committee of the GA

Led the resurgence of Bridport – formed the new team who grew it from average of 10 people to 250 attending its largest annual service.

Current main occupation: Currently working: owning and running diversified family property, agricultural, tourism, retail and construction businesses founded by my Unitarian forebears long ago. See www.symondsburyestate.co.uk

Other relevant information: Founded and led two other community projects through explosive start-up and growth phases. Additional career experience in sectors other than those already mentioned in Financial Services, Lobbying and Alliances.

Election statement: Standing on the shoulders of Unitarian reformers working over several decades, the EC is in the process of transforming itself and the GA into a growth organisation capable of starting the 'big push'. However most of the committee are from the public sector. A balance of skills is essential otherwise some of the balance of knowledge how to succeed may not be present on the committee.

As a successful working entrepreneur (with time available and a track record of building community organisations) I provide some of those essential skills that are necessary for success.

Also, proudly heading a family that has been Unitarian for at least thirteen generations, I am putting all family resources behind the success of the mission to make our way of life the default way of life in the 21st Century.

I am wholly reassured that we are now, with any luck at all, on the cusp of that success.

Depending on progress, the EC will make decisions on whom to co-opt either at the May or by the July meeting.

'EC members may also want to do a trustee skills audit of the new EC similar to the one done two years ago which identified the skills and knowledge of the membership and what gaps existed. At that time they identified that they needed a ministerial member as well as someone with business and/or marketing experience. As the new EC needs to appoint the co-opted member this will not be possible for the Annual Meetings induction or handover ceremony.'

The biographical and electoral statements submitted by the candidates follow.



ion: three members to be co-opted

Lynne Readett – Incumbent

Unitarian Association: Lifelong association full quota paying member from 1992

Relevant experience within the Unitarian community: Executive Committee May 2014-Current; Treasurer Unitarian Ministerial Fellowship 2008 to current; Observer - Ministerial Fellowship Pension Fund - 2008 to current; Member Unitarian College Committee - 2010 to current; Member Widows Fund Committee 2012 to cessation; Secretary North West Provincial Assembly 2013 to current; District Minister on the Merseyside Area (with lead responsibilities at Park Lane Chapel, Cairo Street Chapel, Southport Church) from 2007 to 2015 serving on their committees as their minister. Foundation Governor of Chowbent Primary School 1996 to current

Current main occupation: Retired Minister formerly I was self-employed as a manufacturers agent, calling on the retail shops in the north of England, selling imported furnishing fabrics, in effect I was the 'middle man'.

Other relevant information:

In business I worked directly with manufacturers I represented dealing with day to day issues and long term fabric range development. During District Ministry I served on chapel committees also with voluntary committees, such as the homeless unit at Warrington, working closely with members of other clergy and council representatives. I have been serving the movement as a co-opted member of the EC for the past year and have gained good background knowledge of the forward moving initiatives that have been firstly proposed and are now being implemented. It would be an honour to continue to serve and see these initiatives come to full fruition.

Election statement: I would hope that you will view my ministerial experience as a valued component for EC membership, I feel I bring to the table a sense of God's purpose in all of our deliberations and that my experience working with varied and very different congregations will be a valuable addition to the EC. My previous background was one of business and commerce and so I have a good knowledge of the workings of the boardroom and the manner in which committee decisions need to be processed. My Unitarian background goes back three generations; I feel Unitarianism is 'in my bones' so to speak. I want the best for all Unitarians all across the country whether you are from a chapel with a strong membership or from a smaller fellowship. I wish to serve and trust you will give me that opportunity.



ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE ELECTORAL PANEL

I confirm I have received nominations for the following candidates:

	Title	Name	Surname	Congregation	Signed by	Position
1	Sir	Philip	Colfox	Bridport Chapel in the Garden	Angelica Kennard	Secretary
2	Rev	Lynne	Readett	Chowbent Chapel (Atherton)	Susan Loudon	Secretary, Chapel Committee
3	Rev	Matthew	Smith	Bury St Edmunds Framlingham	Richard Hegerty Mrs J A Croucher	Chair, Congregation Committee Acting Secretary, Congregation Committee

GA Constitution paragraph 7.e. states: If the number of candidates remaining validly nominated for an election is less than the number of members to be elected to the Executive Committee, then -

- the candidates validly nominated shall be declared elected unopposed, and
- the Executive Committee shall fill any vacancy by appointment within six months from the date the declaration of valid nominations were received. Any such appointed person shall serve until the next Executive Committee election.

All nominations have been accepted. In accordance with the Constitution, the number of candidates (3) does not exceed the number of vacancies (6) and an election is therefore not required. All candidates are declared **elected unopposed**.

Certified by:

Anne Hock
Independent Election Supervisor
Popularis Ltd.
26th January 2017

Falling at the feet of the mighty Decca

Decca had for a long time struck me as a strange name for a woman. Then by chance I heard someone use the name, referring to Jessica Mitford and I realised that Decca is a diminutive of Jessica, perhaps created within the Mitford family. The person I was interested in, however, was Decca Aitkenhead, an excellent writer for the *Guardian*. Her speciality is interviewing, and I'm always delighted when one of her interviews is published.

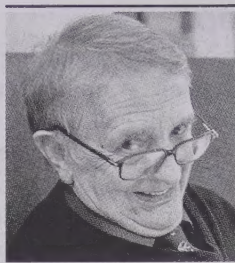
The conversations she holds with all manner of famous individuals are both perceptive and revealing, and she manages them without intruding. Her interviewees seem to get all the 'air time', so that one almost forgets that she is there. She was named Interviewer of the Year at the 2009 British Press Awards. Then, a couple of years ago, the dramatic news was published that her partner, charity worker Tony Wilkinson, had died in a drowning accident trying to rescue one of their children, while on holiday in Jamaica. The boy survived, he didn't. Soon after that she was diagnosed with cancer. She has published a book about all of this, described by reviewer Kate Kellaway as, 'Impossible to forget. I finished it in one sitting – in a paralysed, stunned, empathetic trance.'

As she has also written about cancer treatment my interest was aroused, as 'the devil cancer', as one kind colleague calls it, has taken up residence in my prostate. My treatment, however, has the problem under control and is by no means as dramatic as the chemotherapy that Aitkenhead has described with an astonishing honesty. All of this lay behind my decision to attend a *Guardian* Masterclass in January.

As an amateur, I was attracted to a day called *Essentials of Journalism*, especially when I saw that Decca Aitkenhead was listed as lead speaker. The adage tells me, 'Never meet your heroes', but the idea of gleaning a few ideas and a little inspiration from a day in such excellent company was irresistible. I also like the idea of being in the home of the *Guardian*, now in York Way, in the burgeoning Kings Cross District in London. Recalling the paper's Unitarian origin, I was pleased that the sessions were held in the Scott Room, named for CP Scott, lifelong Unitarian and editor of the paper for over 50 years. There to welcome us was Decca, tall, handsome with a slightly hippy dress and demeanour, including a willingness to sit on the floor during sessions. Her talk was enthralling, stimulating, filled with examples and advice.

Did I fall for her? Yes, but she turned her back on me! In her main presentation, she asked for a couple of volunteers to take part in a role-play to illustrate what can happen in an interview. I eagerly put up my hand, but as I stepped up on to the platform I stumbled and fell, almost onto my nose. She helped me up into the chair that had been placed for me.

Alas, my role was not to be interviewed, but to be the PR person that a celebrity interviewee had brought along to sit in and make sure all went well. She told her listeners that the way to deal with such an unhelpful intrusion was to shift the chairs so that the interviewer sat with her back to him. That was, in this imagined scenario, me. Ah, well, fame eludes me again.



Funny Old World

By John Midgley

Other speakers told of the major changes in the world of journalism since the emergence of the social media. These changes present a problem to *The Inquirer* as well as all national newspapers. What does the future hold for printed publications? Decca Aitkenhead described her reaction to the rise of *Twitter* and *Facebook* etc. 'I sat with my fingers in my ears, waiting for it all to just go away!'

At the coffee break I asked her more about this. 'Fortunately, as an interviewer, it doesn't affect me very much. I wouldn't consider interviewing on-line. My work is face to face. I think it's the only way of getting to the truth of what a person is.' That was the extent of my interview with her!

Investigative journalist Jon Henley told that he had decided to embrace the changes, which do not mean the end of print but an interplay with social media *and* so-called hard copy. He described a visit to Greece to look at the effects of the economic crisis, the influence of the EU and all that. He put out an online request for stories of how the economic hardship was affecting people every day.

Material came flooding in, including from a class of schoolchildren, from doctors giving extra time free and from a theatre, putting on extra performances, tickets to be paid for in food, which was then passed on to a local food bank. All this was published by him *both* in the social media *and* the print version.

Another speaker gave advice on how to break into journalism by 'pitching' to editors, but I shall only follow that up if I decide to become rich and famous.

A few days later Decca's *Guardian* interview with Piers ('I'd rather you hate me than ignore me.') Morgan appeared. The interviewer interviewed. Clearly, he had either not known, or chosen to ignore the advice once given out to politicians by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown's spin doctors. 'Thou shalt under no circumstances do an interview with Decca Aitkenhead.' Again, her presence in the interview was subtle and unobtrusive. She managed, briefly, to evoke some of the softer, more thoughtful side that few people see. So, is she so very dangerous? I don't think so, but then I'm not in politics. And she did say, at one point, 'Nothing gives me greater pleasure than getting people to say things they didn't mean to!' Would I like to be interviewed by her? In my dreams!

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

A chance to discover small beginnings

By Steven Williams

Registration has just opened for the 2017 Unitarian Discovery holiday. Rising from the ashes of Unitarian Experience Week, Unitarian Discovery Holiday has since 2012 evolved an identity of its own, with a distinctive mix of fellowship and fun. In 2016 the theme was 'Navigate Life – Mapping Ourselves', and in July about 16 people navigated the roads to the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow with enthusiasm for a week of discovery.

Early arrivals enjoyed tea and cake in the lounge, and after dinner there was a quiz, with questions about transport, journeys and places, including a round in which we were called on to identify Unitarian places of worship from clues about the name (e.g. which chapel has an African capital city in its name? Cairo Street, Warrington).

There was the usual programme of walks, led by David Copley. A session of Music Appreciation, with a selection including Wagner, Rimsky-Korsakov, Duke Ellington, Flanders and Swann, and Kraftwerk. There were two theme talks, and these were given by a married couple. Firstly the Rev Jean



Alex Bradley with his collection

Bradley led a session on *Real Landscapes*, which included a stroll round the grounds noting what we saw, before we returned to the centre to make our own "personal maps".

The second theme talk was by Jean's husband, the Rev Alex Bradley. His theme was *A Transport of Delight*. Accompanied by part of his collection of transport memorabilia, Alex spoke about his passion for trains, trams and buses, asking us to share our memories about public transport. Afterwards we travelled to Crich Tramway Village, near Matlock, for an enjoyable day looking at and riding on a variety of

trams from all parts of the country.

Other features of the holiday included walks, crafts, and a choir and music group. Each day began and ended with Spiritual Reflections, which the attendees took turns to lead.

There will be another Unitarian Discovery Holiday in Great Hucklow this year. It will take place between 17-21 July, and the theme will be 'The Butterfly Effect – Small Beginnings, Large Consequences'. See you there!

More details about Unitarian Discovery Holiday are available from www.ukunitarians.org.uk/discovery/ and www.facebook.com/unitariandiscoveryholiday/.

Hucklow Summer School 2017

For Personal and Leadership Development

'Walk Your Path with Joy'

Finding Hope and Resisting
Despair in Turbulent Times



19th to 26th August 2017

The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

Applications due by 3rd April 2017

Allocation of places will be confirmed in May 2017

Hucklow Summer School: Part of the GA of Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches, Registered Charity: No. 250788

Hucklow Summer School brings fellow Unitarians together and allows them to get to know each other deeply and form lasting connections. The core purpose of summer school week is religious education: we focus on matters of religion and spirituality and intend to draw out and develop the potential of all participants. We aim to provide a carefully balanced programme, offering a rich mix of activities for both the heart and head, and a wide variety of optional sessions including country walks, poetry, discussions and crafts, which participants might 'take home' and try out in their own congregations and communities. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for relaxed fellowship and fun during the week!

Theme Talks: with Nancy Crumbine, Claire MacDonald, Margaret Kirk, Stephen Carlile, Katie McKenna.

A Choice of Daily Engagement Groups:

'Now is the time to Open Your Heart'
with Lindy Latham and Janet Costley

'With Great Good Care'
with Sarah Tinker and Michael Allured

'Forget Your Perfect Offering'
with Elizabeth Birtles and Stephen Crowther

'God in Daily Life – Theological Reflections'
with Jane Blackall and Daniel Costley

Children and Young People's Programme
with Claire Maddocks & Her Team

Basic Cost for Adults (shared room): £500

Some bursaries are available to help with the cost of attending – we would appreciate it if you would get in touch ASAP for further funding advice.

Please visit our website for further details and an application form:

www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk

Alternatively, please telephone Janet Costley on 01732 464211.

Letters to the Editor



A wise call to resistance came just in time

To the Editor:

It was a wonderful article by Jane Blackall in the recent *Inquirer*. ('Time to Resist' 31 January)

I wanted our congregation to discuss 'Being a people of Faith' in our fifth Sunday circle service, but I didn't quite know how to go about it. Then, like a gift from 'heaven', came Jane Blackall's magnificent article. Intelligent, down to earth – she always is – articulate, understandable but no long words or posh turns of phrase, saying just what I wanted.

Thank you, Jane. A breath of fresh air. Someone told me to stand on the shoulders of giants.

Kathy Beckett

Edmund Kell UC
Southampton

Motion on growth was never followed up

To the Editor:

Ant Howe's article (Going through the Motions, 14 January) brings back memories when he refers to a Unitarian General Assembly Resolution that 'committed itself to growth'.

As the proposer of that motion, in 2006, from Stockton-on-Tees congregation, I was elated that it was passed with only one dissenting vote, but very disappointed at the subsequent outcome.

The newly created Executive Committee took almost two years to address the resolution's aim 'to set up

an organisation ... to promote growth'.

It was intended that a growth group should be created with members who believed that growth was possible. This was not stated in the words of the proposal, but I made it clear in my speech. The EC however, formed a group from within its own membership. There has been no attempt to involve people in our congregations – the main purpose of the intended growth group. I further made the point that the idea of growth ought to be permanently on everyone's agenda. I would repeat that to all your readers now, and ask the EC to appoint a growth group on the lines that I have described.

Peter Whitham

Stockton Unitarian Church

Charming school is, in fact, Channing

To the Editor:

I was so pleased to read the article and enjoy the pictures of Rosslyn Hill Chapel in *The Inquirer* dated 31 December. But please correct the spelling of the school choir. It is not 'Charming School', but 'Channing School', named after the eminent American Unitarian.

As an old Unitarian and alumna of this incredible school, quite near in Highgate, we were regular visitors for our Sunday services during the out weekends, when most of the girls went home. (The Unitarian boarders from all over the country could not usually afford the fare home.) My

two sisters and I were boarders and, since I left in 1939, and my daughter and granddaughter have also attended Channing school. I have kept in touch with the school though most of my contemporaries have passed on!

The school was originally opened for ministers' daughters and still has certain governors who are Unitarians, and so I feel very strongly about the school, which gets little publicity as it is.

Charming it is but that is not its name.

Betty Calderara née Maguire
Member, John Pounds Memorial
Unitarian Church
Portsmouth

(Apologies for the error – Ed.)

SACH sends a clear Unitarian message of caring

To the Editor:

I thank John Midgley for 'en passant' giving 'Send a Child' a puff in his 'Funny Old World' column!! Even if he harks back to 'the age of the hyphen'. John, we have gone all modern now, though some still cling to and hanker after the old ways...!

My comment with which his piece is headed (*Many a mickle maketh a muckle*.) wasn't really meant to have the broader light of day than private conversation, since I reflect in more mature years that this childhood-heard expression could conceivably carry hints of anti-Semitism, if you want to push political correctness a very long way. However, I reflect that, alongside 'Inch by Inch...', it is no bad slogan for our longed-for denominational 'growth'. Thank you to all out there working hard in your own local situations.

'Woteva, innit...' some 14/15 groups of children, including another new lot, will be partaking of, being 'treated' to, holidays at the Nightingale centre this spring, summer and autumn, thanks to the generosity of folk. It might not directly bring in new folk to our pews, but it sends a clear message out there that we Unitarians do care about our wider community, and, alongside 'Simple Gifts', in these islands strive to do what we can.

The Rev Ernest Baker

Hon. Sec.

Send a Child to Hucklow Fund

www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only.

Watford, the first Fellowship in the UK

By Rosemary Ruston

Watford Unitarian Fellowship decided it would like to sponsor a coloured edition of the *Inquirer*, partly to tell readers that Fellowships are still an integral part of the General Assembly, but also in memory of John Cornford and other long-term members who have died recently.

Many of our Churches and Chapels have been around for some hundreds of years; Fellowships have existed officially for less than 60. Watford began in 1947 and was accepted by the GA in 1955, when we were registered as a Church. Fellowships arrived officially in the late 1950s, and since then, at least a dozen have been started; there are probably six or seven now.

The GA hoped that Fellowships – groups without a building with no paid leadership and accepted by the Assembly and its District Association – would prove to be growing points, as they had been in the USA. This hasn't really happened so far but who knows what the future may hold. We are a small group but we like to think we're an active group, with several of us making an occasional wave nationally. We've even had a motion accepted at a recent GA Annual Meetings (sadly, after study, it was not implemented).

We hold one service (mainly traditional format) a month in the local Friends Meeting House, and a mid-monthly meeting in member's homes. We mostly rely on visiting preachers but we have also created our own services for years, based on the contributions we each bring on a subject chosen in advance. We've celebrated two anniversaries since we were founded, each with a tree, and the 60th with a cake as well.

We're trying to use social media to reach potential new members. So we have a Facebook page* and a website. Our aim now is to keep them up to date. Like many smaller congregations we can only meet once or twice a month and I think we have to learn to use all the media to find ways which will encourage new people to come again.



The cake cut for us by the Mayor of Watford, who has visited us twice. Photo left: The 60th anniversary tree, a red oak planted in 2007, was placed in Cassiobury Park. Even in January when this photo was taken, it had kept many of its leaves. There were numerous leafless trees around, and apart from the odd evergreen, ours was uniquely on its own. Almost symbolic!

The challenge of social media

By Steven Williams

I'm rather a late adopter of 'new-fangled' things. The internet had been around for some time before I was persuaded to try it. The same scepticism applied to Facebook when it first came along, but eventually I eagerly embraced it. As a committee member of the Unitarian Discovery Holiday in 2012, I suggested social media as a means of publicity. The reaction was, not unexpectedly, 'Would you like to try?'

So I did – www.facebook.com/unitariandiscoveryholiday was launched shortly afterwards. It has become a useful resource, even if for much of the year it seems the only news it announces concerns members who have died.

Several Unitarian congregations have Facebook pages, and for some time I've tried to persuade Watford Unitarians to follow suit. Then last year we realised that we had an uncertain future, as a combination of deaths, ill-health and moving away had led to a sharp drop in our numbers. New approaches were required to raise our profile, and I was given the go-ahead to set up a Facebook page for the Fellowship.

The Watford Unitarians Facebook page was launched in September 2016, and is a long way from meeting its full potential. It's so far been used to publicise forthcoming services and other events and provide a forum for any feedback. The page will draw attention to District Association meetings and the activities of Unitarian societies, as well as local concerns which our Fellowship supports, such as the Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership.

But this is just the beginning. Other Unitarian congregations have used Facebook to stream audio or visual extracts from services, becoming a way in which people can participate in Unitarian worship if they are unable to attend.

Our Facebook page has not yet brought any new members to Watford, but these are early days. Ultimately, it's unlikely that social media will replace conventional worshipping communities, but instead will complement it. The Unitarian message, to be effective, needs to make use of all available platforms.

Watford Unitarians can be accessed at www.facebook.com/watfordunitarians/

News in brief

Summer School leader marches against Trump



The Rev Dr Nancy Jay Crumbine (centre, with UK flag) and her son Jacob Crumbine attended the Women's March in Washington DC. Nancy, a Unitarian Universalist minister, is a frequent visitor to the UK, known to many Unitarians. She delivered the Essex Hall Lecture at the General Assembly and will give a theme talk at Summer School this year. She said this about the march in Washington:

'The mood of the day was beautifully positive and generous, an odd optimism buoyed by the stunning number of people who had come, not to mention the thousands of hand-knitted pink hats. As soon we headed out in the morning, an hour plus walk from the march, we saw streams of people coming from every direction. And, later in the day as we searched for someplace to eat, all we saw – even after we were miles away from the National Mall, were streams of people with pink hats and banners. Marchers (all ages, colours, genders, etc.) literally flooded the entire city with hope and determination. Keep the faith dear friends. This is just the beginning.' Across the UK, Unitarians marched to protest the newly inaugurated US president. In London, members from Lewisham, New Unity, Godalming and Southampton were represented. Unitarians also marched in Manchester, Norwich, Bridport and several other places where local marches were held.

Aberdeen hosts interfaith gathering

Aberdeen Unitarian Church held a themed Interfaith Service as part of One World Week, in October. The service was led by Caroline Cormack and the theme this year was 'Including You – Acting Together for One World in Peace'. Taking action for justice, locally and globally.

The congregation (below) was joined by representatives from probably the widest range of Faiths that have ever attended an Interfaith Service at Aberdeen Unitarian Church.

Present and contributing to the service were the Imam from Crown Terrace Mosque in Aberdeen, the Chair of the local United Nations Association who was also representing the Quakers and members of the Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Church of Scotland, Hindu, Mormon, Pagan and Unitarian faiths.

As well as readings, meditation and thoughts there was some Hindu chanting and the distribution of written peace messages between those attending. The similarity of the Peace message from all those participating in the service was uplifting.

– Caroline Cormack



Derek McAuley, chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly, recently attended a strategic consultation between Christian Aid and the sponsoring churches. Derek (right) is beside the Most Rev Dr Rowan Williams, Christian Aid chair, with the Rev Robert McKee, clerk of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and his wife Lorna. Photo provided by Derek McAuley.

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